

Final Notes October 8, 1997

DECISION PROCESS COORDINATING GROUP  
MEETING NOTES

September 4, 1997, 10:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE OFFICES  
PORTLAND, OREGON

I. Greeting and Introductions.

The September 4 meeting of the Decision Process Coordinating Group (IT/PATH), held at the National Marine Fisheries Service's offices in Portland, Oregon, was chaired by NMFS consultant Ed Sheets. The agenda for the September 4 meeting and a lists of attendees is attached as Enclosures A and B. The following is a distillation (not a verbatim transcript) of items discussed at the meeting, together with actions taken on those items.

I. Greetings and Introductions.

Sheets welcomed everyone to the meeting, led a round of introductions and a review of the agenda. These formalities concluded, Sheets provided a brief background statement about the activities of the group, essentially, that the group consists of members from both the Implementation Team and the Plan for Analyzing and Testing Hypotheses (PATH), and its task is to ensure that the activities of these groups are well coordinated. The IT/PATH committee's meetings are informal, and an official membership list has never been generated, Sheets said. The primary focus of discussion at the group's meetings has been, how are we going to make the big decision about mainstem configuration?

One result of those discussions is a paper (Enclosure C), titled A Discussion Paper on a Process for Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Restoration Decisions, he continued. NMFS is now circulating this paper; they had a meeting with federal state and tribal policy makers on July 23 in Spokane. Also, at its last meeting, the Implementation Team briefly discussed (Enclosure C), and referred it back to IT/PATH with a request that this group develop some recommendations about how to address the issues raised in this paper, Sheets continued. The IT also requested that we come up with a different name for this group, it isn't exactly IT, it isn't exactly PATH, but in its present form, it is confusing. Sheets suggested the Decision Process Coordinating Group.

In terms of today's agenda, said Sheets, the group can discuss the issues raised in the paper further. He also wanted the group to discuss how best to involve the decision makers themselves in designing this decision process, to make sure they are fully engaged, as well as how our efforts fit in with the Three Sovereigns process.

One overall concern, said PATH coordinator Dave Marmorek of ESSA Technologies, is that no

matter how clever we are in designing a decision process, if the decision makers are not at the table when it's developed, they are not going to want to use our process. If we're not interacting with the decision makers, and testing our ideas on a regular basis, that's going to be trouble down the road. I agree, said Sheets, and I think it's clear to all of us that the decision, ultimately, may be made based on factors other than those we come up with here. I know Will Stelle is committed to trying to get the policy folks in the region (the decision makers) to focus on this question of how the decision should be made. Those discussions began in earnest at the July 23 meeting, and I would like to talk today about further ways to get policy-level focus, Sheets said.

It's the nature of this process that the technical teams perform analysis and develop recommendations based on what the science tells them; those recommendations are then referred to the policy-level decision makers, who do what they feel is the right thing to do said one meeting participant. However, that doesn't discount the value of trying to assemble the best available technical information in rational order, and let the chips fall where they may, said Chip McConnaha of the Northwest Power Planning Council staff. McConnaha pointed out that there are many parallels between the IT/PATH process and the Council's effort to develop a framework for the 1999 decision; I'm not sure how best to integrate those two processes, he said. We certainly don't need to re-invent the wheel, agreed Sheets -- we should do our best to pull all of the various efforts in the region together.

In response to a question, Sheets said it is still not known whether the 1999 decision will focus strictly on ESA stocks, or whether the scope will be broader. Will Stelle is trying to stimulate that discussion, he said, because NMFS is hearing that a focus restricted to the ESA may not be acceptable to the region.

The group spent a few minutes discussing the "Scope" question. One example of where I get hung up, said McConnaha, is Page 6 (of Enclosure C), where, under a list of appropriate decision criteria, the paper includes a short section on Treaty Obligations:

"The decision should help rebuild harvestable fisheries to meet treaty obligations to Northwest Indian tribes and Canada."

If you evaluate Snake River passage decisions in light of what is needed for delisting, as well as what is needed for delisting and to provide a harvestable surplus of fish to satisfy treaty obligations, you might come up with very different answers to the question of what system configuration path the region should pursue, said McConnaha. However, the real test of any of the recovery pathways is whether they will improve survival enough so that the stocks can withstand a wide range of environmental conditions, said Tom Cooney of WDFW. Everything I've seen from the modeling work says that, if you meet that test, you'll provide a substantial harvest in most years.

The discussion turned to the role of this committee in developing the decision process. My understanding is that the IT reviewed this discussion paper (Enclosure C) and identified a number of issues that require further discussion and analysis, said Sheets. The IT recognized a need to form a working group to come to grips with those issues, and to develop some recommendations to the region. The question is, are the people around this table comfortable spending their time working on these issues, to see if we can come up with those

recommendations? Is that something we can take a shot at? he asked.

Your idea, then, is that this group will develop options related to things like goals, decision criteria, scope, etc., for further discussion by IT, CRITFC, the Council etc.? asked McConnaha. My personal goal is to go through these and any other issues, and, if possible, reach consensus (defined as “no strong opposition”) on a recommendation, Sheets replied. It may be that the best we can do is to narrow the focus to a couple of options, with a brief written explanation of the pros and cons of each position. After a brief discussion, the group raised no disagreements to Sheets’ suggested approach.

The next question is, do we have the right people at this table? Sheets asked. Obviously BPA should be involved, suggested one participant. If we’re going to continue to discuss changes in flow augmentation, said another, the Bureau should be represented here as well. BPA was invited, but chose not to attend today’s meeting, said Sheets; I’ve sent the discussion paper to the Bureau, and will follow up on that. And if there are any other agencies or organizations that others at this table feel should be a part of this effort, let’s do our best to get them involved.

## II. Review of the Discussion Paper.

Marmorek said he had attempted to summarize Sheets’ discussion paper on a single page, then, in a structured way, to look at different ways to approach what the decision will be, and what criteria will be used to make it. One thing I wanted to see was whether there were some common elements in the “Goals” sections of the paper and the PATH process, because ultimately, what you measure, and what criteria you use, depend on what you’re trying to do, Marmorek said. The result of this analysis was the following modified “Goals” list:

### RESTORE THE

- Biological integrity
- Natural production
- Genetic Diversity

### OF THE

- Columbia Basin ecosystem and its
- Native fish and wildlife populations

### TO SUPPORT

- Sustainable harvest
- Social, cultural and economic benefits
- Treaty obligations

One thing that does not appear explicitly on this list of goals is Endangered Species Act responsibilities, Marmorek said. However, those responsibilities are encompassed on this list.

Marmorek went on to lay out what he called a hierarchical approach to salmon-related decision making, which is described in Enclosure D. He spent a few minutes going through this decision management matrix, which, he explained, incorporates both qualitative and quantitative information in weighting various decision criteria.

Lynne Krasnow made the point that this criteria weighting exercise will ultimately come down to

a series of tradeoffs for the region, what are people willing to give up, in exchange for benefits in other areas? However, a number of entities involved in the 1999 decision have responsibilities that they cannot trade off, NMFS being only one example. It would be helpful, she said, if, in presenting this type of approach to the region, you could clarify which individuals actually have the authority to talk about tradeoffs.

Do we want to attempt to define the overall goal of this process, or would that be reinventing the wheel? asked Sheets. The Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority has been working on a draft goal, which contains virtually all of the elements we've been discussing today:

“Restore sustainable, naturally-producing fish and wildlife populations to restore tribal and non-tribal harvest and cultural and economic practices. This goal will be achieved by restoring the genetic diversity of the Columbia River ecosystem, and through other measures that are compatible with naturally-producing fish and wildlife populations.”

We could decide that CBFWA's goal, with some modifications, is our recommended goal, said Sheets. What I thought I heard earlier was that, if we can maintain biological integrity, and stimulate natural production, that should eventually bring about biological diversity. Restoring the biological integrity of the Columbia River ecosystem should provide sustainable, harvestable fish populations, which will support treaty obligations, as well as social, cultural and economic benefits, observed McConnaha.

The next step in the discussion paper is “Develop Appropriate Decision Criteria,” said Sheets. The language contained in the paper (see pp. 5-6 of Enclosure C) was lifted almost verbatim from the PATH process. Marmorek spent a few minutes going through these criteria; Sheets asked whether the other meeting participants are generally comfortable with the biological criteria development process PATH is using, or whether there are any obvious holes that need to be filled in. The sockeye is one obvious hole, but given the limited amount of available data for those fish, how to model sockeye is a real problem, said COE's Greg Graham. There are also a host of system-related improvements, such as surface collectors and FGE improvements for both the in-river and transport alternatives that need to be folded into the analysis. The other hole we've been discussing is the fact that we have yet to really agree on what exactly we're talking about in terms of harvest, added Marmorek. We need to interact more to make that link. Other gaps identified in the course of this discussion included short-term biological impacts during dam removal, as well as habitat issues, what is the maximum increase or decrease in quality habitat each of the index stocks can be expected to see as a result of the various recovery alternatives?

The discussion turned to the alternative recovery scenarios that will be included in the decision criteria development process. In response to a question, Marmorek said that PATH, by the fall of 1997, will complete its analysis of the following scenarios:

- A1: base case (flow augmentation in the Columbia and Snake Rivers, no Drawdown)
- A2: maximized transportation without surface collectors
- A2 Prime: maximized transportation with surface collectors
- A3: current flow augmentation, plus Drawdown of the four Lower Snake dams.

Due to time constraints, we'll focus first on the best and worst cases for various uncertainties,

Marmorek said. That will give us information on where the key uncertainties lie, and where we should focus the next phase of our effort. We have to approach this iteratively, he said, otherwise we'll be wasting time -- at this point, there are more scenarios than there are salmon.

The group spent a few minutes discussing how best to begin putting all of the multitudinous facets of this analytical exercise together. My recommendation, said Marmorek, is that, at a future meeting of this group, we simply do a trial run of the decision matrix outlined in (Enclosure D), inserting wild guesses where we don't have the information we need, just to see whether this method will work for us, without taking it too seriously. That will help to tell us what we don't know, he said. I think that could be very instructive, said Sheets, particularly from the standpoint of learning whether we're generating enough information for the decisionmakers to go on. It will be very discouraging, to say the least, if, when we provide our ultimate work products to those decisionmakers, we discover that they really needed to know something quite different. It would be infinitely preferable to get that type of feedback now, when we can still have time to develop additional information. So the purpose of this exercise would not be to predict the outcome of each of these scenarios, it would be to identify whether we have the activities in place that will provide the decisionmakers with the information they need to make the ultimate decision? asked Howard Schaller of ODFW. Yes, was the reply.

After some minutes of further discussion, the group agreed that this decision matrix trial run would be beneficial; it was further agreed to apply it to the following four action alternatives: 1) enhanced transportation; 2) Snake River Drawdown; 3) Snake River + John Day Drawdown and 4) base case. And again, said Sheets, the idea is to plug in some dummy numbers, to see whether the methodology does or does not make sense. It was further agreed to run through this exercise as a committee, rather than assigning the task to a subgroup who would then present their findings to the rest of the group.

Moving on, the group discussed the criteria listed under Sections 1, 2, 3 and 4 of Enclosure D. With the meeting drawing to a close, Sheets volunteered to distribute the study plan for the economic component of this analysis for group review prior to the next meeting. That study plan goes into quite a bit of detail about the kinds of information that will be gathered on the economic side, he said; if you have an opportunity to review that beforehand, it might lead to a more efficient discussion. It was so agreed. Sheets also asked Earl Weber to report back at the next meeting on CRITFC's efforts to develop treaty obligations criteria.

### III. Next Meeting Date and Agenda Items.

So in terms of the agenda for next meeting, Sheets continued, we'll go through the decision matrix trial run exercise, then continue with a discussion of what we've learned from that exercise. If we have time, we'll talk about the decision schedule, as well as how to involve the decisionmakers. We should also discuss the Three Sovereigns process and its relationship to our efforts.

The next meeting of the IT/PATH work group was set for Thursday, September 18 from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., location t.b.a. (This meeting date was subsequently changed to Tuesday, September 30). For the foreseeable future, it was agreed that this group will meet every two weeks. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.